



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Elder Abuse Prevention Month Observed in May *Adult Protective Services strives to educate mandated reporters*

Richmond, VA – Each year an estimated two million elderly adults are victims of abuse or neglect. Sexual assault, financial, verbal and physical abuses are just some of the mistreatments faced by elderly individuals from their caregivers.

May is Elder Abuse Prevention Month and in observance the Virginia Department of Social Services is launching a campaign to educate the public about mandated reporting and what to look for in cases of suspected abuse.

New legislation passed by the 2004 session of the General Assembly creates additional mandates for Adult Protective Services (APS) workers. Among many changes, The Adult Protective Services Act clarifies and expands the list of mandated reporters to include persons licensed, certified, or registered by health regulatory boards - except for the Board of Veterinary Medicine.

This clarification adds dentists, pharmacists, certified emergency medical services personnel, guardians and conservators to the list of those mandated to report suspected elder abuse.

"I can see no down side to this bill, only an improvement in the care of elders," said Dr. Marcella Fierro, chief medical examiner of the Commonwealth in a letter supporting the legislation. "I have always said that the civility and compassion of a society could be measured by how it cares for its elderly. Obviously it is even more true for our abused and neglected seniors, many of whom have no voice, cannot cry for help, and pray for death to relieve them of their misery. We should do this."

In Virginia, more than 12,000 cases of suspected elder abuse were reported and investigated by social services in 2003. However, it is estimated this represents only 16 percent of the abuse cases that occur.

"Many of these crimes are not reported because mandated reporters don't know they should be reporting or because they don't know what to look for," said Family Services Acting Director Terry A. Smith. "The APS Act requires us to educate and train mandated reporters on the signs of abuse so that more crimes against elders will be reported and stopped."

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The APS Act also allows civil penalties for non-reporting by mandated reporters. “Thousands of cases of abuse, neglect and exploitation of the elderly go unreported each year,” said Smith. “By imposing civil penalties for non-reporting, we hope that those who are liable to report these crimes will now think twice before looking the other way.”

The staff of APS will soon implement a comprehensive training program for mandated reporters but Smith reiterates that anyone can report suspected abuse of the elderly. Some signs to look for include: injuries that have not been properly cared for; burns, welts, scratches, bruises and fractures; signs of confinement; malnourishment; severe anxiety, fearfulness or depression; missing personal property or mismanaged property or savings.

If you suspect abuse of an elder or an adult with disabilities, report it to the local department of social services, or call the 24 hour toll-free hotline at (888) 832-3858.

For more information on the Adult Protective Services Act and other APS information visit the following Web sites:

- <http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?041+ful+CHAP1011+pdf>
- http://www.seniornavigator.com/learn/connections/DSSfor2004/27_proclamation2.doc
- <http://www.dss.state.va.us/pub/pdf/aps.pdf>
- <http://www.dss.state.va.us/family/adultprotect.html>
- www.seniornavigator.com

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